

(Delphi, Greece. Photo by Leah Himmelhoch)

Were ancient Greeks & Romans ‘White’ People?

Part II: How Archaeological and Textual Sources Reflect Greco-Roman Antiquity’s Diversity

← Venetus A Manuscript. 10th c. CE. *Iliad* of Homer. Image from EPICPOEM.org. Attribution Non-Commercial-NoDerivs 4.0 International

Before reviewing archaeological & textual sources, we must define some terms then address two relevant, modern assumptions:

1. First, we should clearly define how this presentation uses the terms ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’:

Race: the classification of people based upon their perceived physical forms and traits (i.e., physical, bodily differences), often for placement in a social hierarchy of value and/or ability.

Ethnicity: “the classification of people according to ideas about ancestry and descent” (Mac Sweeney 2025: 103) — an ancestral connection, real or imagined, that can manifest culturally.

For example, we consider: 1) Kenyans & the English *both* racially & ethnically distinct from each other; while 2) the Welsh & the English are racially the same but ethnically different. Yet the Greeks & Romans sometimes identify people *we* view as ethnically different but racially the same as *both* ethnically *and* *innately* (what we would call ‘racially’) different due to different hair, height, etc. We should also note that their classifications of difference were constantly shifting, both between regions — even city-states, in the Greeks’ case — and across time.

2. Modern assumption 1: Historian Richard Alston (2022) notes that, “Racism is understood as the use of various minor corporeal differences, in particular skin color, to create categories of people. Those categories are subsequently associated with identities, which reinforce that categorisation. Such categorisation is a peculiar and perverse modern idea. Greeks and Romans didn’t think in these ways. They were aware of differences. But for Romans, White or Black were not meaningful social categories. As a result, our sources hardly ever mention skin pigmentation, since it wasn’t important to them. It is normally impossible for us to associate particular ancients with those modern racial categories. But this absence of evidence has allowed the assumption that most prominent Romans were, in our terms, White. However, there is every reason to think that many leading Romans were, in our terms, Black... Many Romans were dark-skinned. Yet for moderns, this seems surprising and an assertion that requires justification... Black Romans were central to classical culture and not as an exceptional few or as slaves or servants. They were soldiers and traders, dramatists, poets, philosophers, theologians, and emperors. We need to re-imagine imperial Romans as having a completely unsurprising diversity of skin pigmentation.”

3. Modern assumption 2: Regarding North Africans, Professor Rebecca Futo Kennedy emphasizes that: “Typically, we read that *Ethiopian* is the term that ancients used to refer to people with dark skin tones, those we would call black, and that these are often also referred to as sub-Saharan Africans... Herodotus, however, clearly places black Africans in northwest and north central Africa and not as slaves but as indigenous and early. And according to Herodotus, they are living north of the Sahara, since the Sahara beyond its edges merges into the uninhabitable zone and then Ocean [[see Herodotus’s map of the world](#)]. He states that they live “south” of the Libyans, but “south” for Herodotus is still north of or in the Sahara. As far as Herodotus and others well into the Roman period were concerned, ‘sub-Saharan’ either didn’t exist or it was an uninhabitable zone in between them and the Antichthonēs, ‘opposite-land’ (as Pomponius Mela calls the mystical southern continent [[Book 1.3-23 \(pp. 34-40\)](#)]); for his map, see [here](#)]. Strabo, too, writing in the 1st century BCE-CE, writes of groups of black Africans living in northwestern Africa — the Pharusians and Nigritae, whom he places near the ‘western Ethiopians’ (17.3.7). How do we know they are likely black? Because they are said to be like the Ethiopians and the Pharusians, in particular, are linked to southern Indians, whom many ancient authors think either were immigrants from Africa or migrated to Africa. The Mauri (later Moors) are also located in northwestern Africa, but Mauri, like Berber, is not necessarily a clear term that associated with skin tone in antiquity — evidence links them more to geography and nomadic lifestyle and when skin colors are mentioned, they range from light to dark...”

In other words, there were black Africans living north of and in the Sahara in antiquity. Herodotus never mentions their skin tones as warranting discussion, likely because he had placed them in the torrid zone on the map and environment dictated they would be dark skinned. The Phoenicians and Greeks came there with their lighter brown skin, more northern Libyans were environmentally browner than Greeks and Phoenicians, but lighter than the Ethiopians and others.”

Hence, in our historical imaginations, we should:

- 1) avoid the impulse to automatically ‘see’ ancient Greeks & Romans (even famous figures) as ‘white’. It is inaccurate. It also keeps students from ‘seeing’ evidence that indicates an individual may have been darker-skinned.***
- 2) avoid ‘reading’ ancient Africa with modern geographic/demographic assumptions (since modern racist narratives like to treat North Africans, especially Egyptians, as more ‘white-seeming’ than not).***

Let us now turn to bronze age texts and archaeology...

Some archaeological evidence for Minoan & Mycenaean contact with other cultures in or near the Mediterranean



← **2400 – 2000 BCE:** hippopotamus ivory, gold, chalcedony, amethyst, ostrich-shell products, and Egyptian stone bowls & scarabs appear in ‘elite’ Cretan tombs in ‘secure contexts,’ i.e., we know the datable Egyptian items can provide accurate dates for the tombs, too. Minoan seals (small carved ‘stamps’ serving as signatures for wealthier individuals) also adapt Egyptian motifs and hieroglyphs (Colburn 2008).

Between 2000 – 1800 BCE, Minoan products start to appear in Egypt in increasing numbers, e.g., Minoan Kamares ware pottery (or → Egyptian copies), and Minoan (or Minoan-influenced) silver cups from the ‘Tod treasure’ (El-Tod village near Luxor, Egypt).

Left: Kamares ware fragment; Memphite region of Egypt (The Met, 22.1.1406); Right: ‘Tod Treasure’ silver, Minoan-style cups).

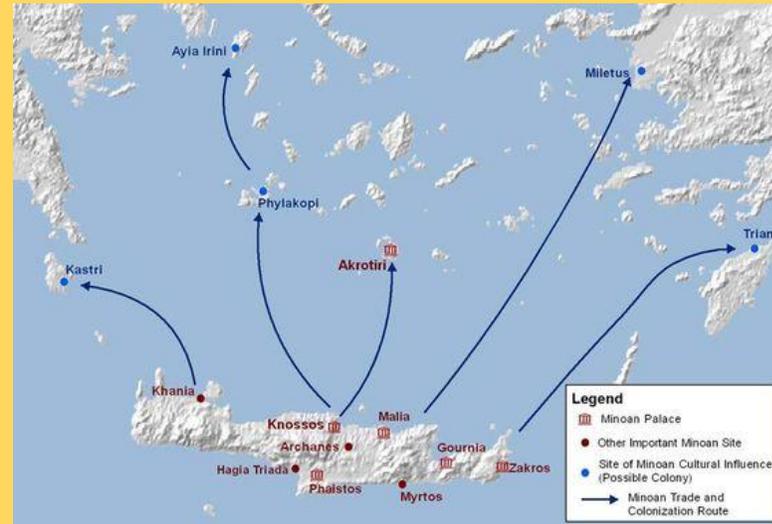


Figure 6 Early Minoan III; Middle Minoan IA hippopotamus ivory seals. a) Length: 2.3 cm, CMS 11.1, no. 469 / 184 S-K199 from Spilargares. b) Length: 3.5 cm, Width: 1.6 cm, Thickness: 3.2 cm, CMS 11.1, no. 248 / 184 S-K199 from Platanos tholos A.c) Length: 1.97 cm, Width: 1.9 cm, Thickness: 2.07 cm, CMS 11.1, no. 312a / 184 S-K199 from Tholos thomb (D.c) Length: 3.33 cm, Width: 1.32 cm, Thickness: 2.87 cm, CMS 11.1, no. 312b / 184 S-K199 from Platanos tholos B.c) Length: 2.5 cm, Width: 2.18 cm, CMS 11.1, no. 443b / 184 S-K199 from the Tapes cave.

Image from Fouda 2013: 150.

In the 1900s BCE, the Minoans establish a settlement at Miletus → on Anatolia’s (modern Turkey’s) southwestern coast to facilitate trade & contact with Anatolia, Cyprus, and the Middle East.

In the 1600s BCE, the Minoans establish a settlement at Trianda → (on the island of Rhodes), likely for reasons of trade & diplomacy.



← **By the 1800 – 1700s BCE,** Akrotiri on Thera (Santorini) is wholly ‘Minoanized.’ Katri (on Naxos), Phylakopi (on Melos), and Agia Irini (on Kea) also exhibit strong Minoan influence. In fact, Minoan culture pervades the Cyclades (western Aegean islands). Whether this is due to extensive contact, because they are part of a Minoan trade route (for northern access), or a sign of Minoan political/military control, is debated. All could be true to some extent (Barber 2010: 163).

Starting c. 1650 BCE, the Mycenaeans create a network of contacts with Southern Italy, Sicily, & Sardinia that last into the 1000s BCE. Mycenaean pottery can be found throughout Italy & these islands.

Around 1600 BCE, Mycenaean shaft graves are full of precious objects from Crete, Egypt, Mesopotamia, & the Levant (all of which likely came from Minoan trade networks). There is also evidence for independent Mycenaean contact with the ‘north’ (Europe) and Anatolia (modern Turkey).

From the 1600s-1400s BCE, Minoan artists (or artists imitating Minoan style) paint frescoes at palaces in Alalakh (Anatolia, 1600s-1500s BCE), Quatna (Syria, 1500s-1400s BCE), → Tel Kabri (Israel, c. 1600 BCE), and Tell el-Daba (Egypt, mid-1400s BCE?). Minoan art was part of a “cosmopolitan” cultural exchange and a form of extravagant display amongst the eastern Mediterranean elite (Cline & Yasur-Landau 2013).



Minoan Bull Leaper; Tell el-Daba, Egypt.

← **1479-1400 BCE(?)** we see our earliest example of ‘Keftiu’ (Minoan Cretans) depicted in Egypt, in the Tomb of Rekhmire.

Mid-to-late 1400s BCE, the Mycenaeans assume control of Knossos (Crete), along with Trianda (Rhodes) and the Minoan settlement at Miletus.

In the 1400s - 1300s BCE, Mycenae and Tiryns (a nearby Mycenaean city-state in the Argolid) show signs of direct contact with Egypt & Cyprus (respectively). They seem to be engaged in a ‘trade’ rivalry.

Around 1330-1300 BCE, a Canaanite or Phoenician cargo-ship sinks off Turkey’s coast at Uluburun carrying: two elite Mycenaean passengers (given two pairs of matching swords and Mycenaean pottery for daily use, not shipping); four Canaanite merchants (given the number of personalized weight sets); a European man (given the style of a sword and other personal items, Pulak 2010: 872); as well as Egyptian, Syrian, Canaanite, & Anatolian cargo. This ship reflects the international character of overseas trade in the eastern Mediterranean.



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Textual evidence for bronze age contact between the Aegean and its neighboring cultures

Though the Minoan writing system, Linear A, has not been deciphered, we can read Mycenaean Greek documents written in Linear B (a script derived from Linear A). We can also read what the Egyptian, Hittite, Mesopotamian & Luwian (LOO-vi-an = Anatolian) cultures say about their Aegean neighbors.

I. Mycenaean Greek Linear B tablets list many items from Africa & the Near East. Most of the items retain their original Anatolian, Semitic, or ancient Egyptian names:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1. African blackwood (ebony): <i>ku-te-so</i> , at Pylos | 4. Copper/bronze: <i>ka-ko</i> , at Knossos, Mycenae, & Pylos. | 7. Gold: <i>ku-ru-so</i> , at Knossos & Pylos |
| 2. Blue glass paste: <i>ku-wa-no</i> , at Mycenae & Pylos | 5. Cumin: <i>ku-mi-no</i> , at Mycenae | 8. Sesame: <i>sa-sa-ma</i> , at Mycenae |
| 3. Boxwood: <i>pu-ko-so</i> , at Pylos | 6. Ivory: <i>e-re-pa</i> , at Knossos & Pylos | 9. Terebinth resin: <i>ki-ta-no</i> , at Knossos |

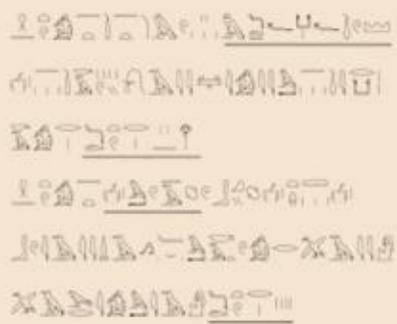
II. Some Linear B tablets also include ethnic adjectives:

- Mainland Greek sites & Knossos often refer to Cyprus: *a-ra-si-jo/Alasian* ‘Alasian’ (Cyprus was called ‘Alasia’) *ku-pi-ri-jo/Kyprios* ‘Cypriot’
- At Knossos we find Egyptian ethnics: one man is named *a-ku-pi-ti-jo* (*Aiguptios* = ‘Egyptian’, or ‘Memphite’); another is called *mi-sa-ra-jo* (*Misraios* ‘Egyptian’).
- At Pylos, we find Anatolian ethnics of women: *a*64-ja/Aswiai*, ‘Lydians’ (in central Anatolia) *mi-ra-ti-ja/Milatai*, ‘Milesians’ (southwestern Anatolia)
ki-ni-di-ja/Knidiai, ‘Knidians’ (southwestern Anatolia) *ra-mi-ni-ja/Lamniai*, ‘Lemnians’ (off Antaolia’s western coast)
ki-si-wi-ja/Kswiai, ‘Chians’ (off Anatolia’s western coast) *ze-pu₂-ra₃/Dzephurrai*, ‘Halikarnassians’ (southwestern Anatolia)
- At Pylos, we possibly see the ethnic ‘Ethiopian’: *a3-ti-jo-qo/Aithiokos* = the later Greek dialect word *Aithiopos* or *Aithiops*

III. External Written Sources:

- Egypt**: Possibly as early as the 1900s BCE, and certainly by the 1600s BCE, Egyptian texts mention the *Kf.tiw* (‘Keftiu,’ Minoans). The *Ti-n3-iw* (Tinayu, ‘Danäans,’ Mycenaean Greeks) are first named around 1550 BCE. The *Papyrus Ebers*, also dated to 1550 BCE, mentions a ‘Keftiu bean’ (a Minoan import?) as an ingredient for a medical spell. Further, from the 1300s BCE: an Egyptian school writing tablet lists ‘Keftiu’ names; Amenophis III’s inscription names the ‘Keftiu’ and ‘Tinayu’ in a list of nations known to Egypt; and the *London Medical papyrus* includes two healing spells in the ‘Keftiu’ language (!). (Kyriakidis 2002).
- Mesopotamia & the Levant**: In the mid-1700s BCE: the Mesopotamian city-state Mari allots tin to an interpreter from Ugarit (a city-state on the coast of modern Syria, across from Cyprus). This interpreter represents the chief merchant of the ‘Caphtorites’ (Cretans), who also lives in Ugarit. Mari also notes a diplomatic gift from Caphtor (gold and lapis lazuli encrusted weapons). Simpler Minoan pottery (for Cretan crews or individual trade) can also be found throughout the Levant. But in the 1500s-1200s BCE, Aegean contact with this region largely runs through Cyprus, so Minoan & Mycenaean wares enter Canaan & the Levant from there.
- The Hittites**: The Hittites first mention the *Ahhiyawa* (‘Achaean,’ Mycenaean Greeks) in the late 1400s BCE. In the early 1300s BCE, a Greek ruler named *Attarissiya* (either a lone Mycenaean king with Anatolian ties or the head of a pan-Mycenaean ‘confederacy’) reportedly attacks a Hittite vassal in Anatolia and raids Cyprus. The Greeks also support western Anatolian states rebelling against Hittite rule. In the mid-1300s, a Greek ruler’s letter to the Hittites protests their seizure of islands off Anatolia’s Aegean coast: his great-grandfather, who married a princess of *Assuwa* (northwestern Anatolia), received these islands as part of her dowry. Thus, as Ahhiyawan territory, the Hittites cannot ‘reclaim’ them after re-conquering the rebellious *Assuwa* region. In the 1200s BCE, Hittite-Mycenaean relations are more combative: king Hattusili III’s letter to *Tawagalawa* (the Ahhiyawan king’s brother) notes that Greeks control *Milawata* (Miletus) and support western Anatolia’s rebels. But c. 1220 BCE, king Tudhaliya IV reclaims *Milawata*, ultimately driving the Greeks from Anatolia (Beckman, Bryce, & Cline 2011).

In sum, our evidence indicates extensive interaction — economically, diplomatically, culturally, & at an individual level — between the bronze age Aegean, Egypt/Africa, the Near East, Italy, and Northern Europe. The Aegean seems to have been an important hub for trade between these regions and gift-exchange between their royalty.



The transcriptions to hieroglyphic are taken from J. STRANGE, *Caphtor/Keftiu. A new investigation*, Leiden 1986

Keftiu spells (in the Keftiu language) transcribed into Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Textual evidence for Greek attitudes towards people with different skin colors (the Archaic Period, c. 800 BCE – 480 BCE)*

(Reminder: ancient Greeks did not consider skin color 'significant' the same way we do, so do not mention it often!)

I. 'Aithiopians' in Homer (8th - 7th c. BCE):

A. The Gods favor the Aithiopians ('shining/burnt-faced men', i.e., dark-skinned men) and still consort with them (though they no longer do so with the rest of mortals):

1) *Iliad* 1.423-5, Thetis explains to Achilles why she cannot talk to Zeus right now:

Ζεὺς γὰρ ἐς Ὀκεανὸν μετ' ἀμύμονας Αἰθιοπῆας
χθιζὸς ἔβη κατὰ δαῖτα, θεοὶ δ' ἅμα πάντες ἔποντο.

For Zeus set out yesterday for the river Ocean to feast
with the worthy Aithiopians, and all the gods followed with him.

2) *Iliad* 23.205-07, Iris (the messenger of the gods) tells the winds that she must depart to be honored by the Aithiopians:

οὐκ ἔδος: εἶμι γὰρ αὖτις ἐπ' Ὀκεανοῖο ῥέεθρα
Αἰθιόπων ἐς γαῖαν, ὅθι ῥέζουσ' ἑκατόμβας
ἀθανάτοισ, ἵνα δὴ καὶ ἐγὼ μεταδαίσομαι ἱρῶν.

No time for sitting. No, for I must go to the streams of Ocean
to the land of the Aithiopians, where they are making a splendid sacrifice of 100 oxen
for the immortal gods. There, indeed, will I have my share of the sacrificial feast.

3) *Odyssey* 1.21-5, Poseidon is off enjoying some time with the Aithiopians:

ἀλλ' ὁ μὲν Αἰθίοπας μετεκίαθε τηλόθ' ἔοντας,
Αἰθίοπας τοὶ διχθὰ δεδαίαται, ἔσχατοι ἀνδρῶν,
οἱ μὲν δυσομένου Ὑπερίονος οἱ δ' ἀνιόντος,
ἀντιῶν ταύρων τε καὶ ἀρνειῶν ἑκατόμβης.
ἔνθ' ὃ γ' ἐτέρπετο δαιτὶ παρήμενος:...

But he [Poseidon] had gone to visit the Aithiopians, so very far away,
who were divided into two groups dwelling in the most remote regions of men:
one group where Hyperion [god of the sun] sets, the other where he rises.
Poseidon went there to receive a splendid sacrifice of hundreds of bulls and rams.
There he was sitting and taking delight in the feast....

B. The Aithiopians' divine favor may relate to two intertwined ancient Greek beliefs, namely that: 1) the earth was a flat disc (so the risingsun came up from beneath the disc to the East then set by dropping below it to the West). People living near these two regions (the path of the sun) were special/supernaturally touched. (Again, 'Aithiopian' means 'burnt/blazing face' since Greeks thought their dark skin color came from sun exposure). Thus, Aithiopians' dark skin marked their proximity to the divine; and, 2) those living at the world's extremes were somehow 'extreme' themselves: either hyper-blessed/magical (e.g., Aithiopians) or hyper-barbaric/monstrous (e.g., Amazons).

II. Dark Skin in Homer:

A. Dark skin was considered masculine (pale skin was feminine (see the next slide's II)). The darker his skin, the more beautiful, masculine, and martially skilled a man was:

1) In *Odyssey* 16.172-6, to help Odysseus defeat the suitors, Athena restores him to his youthful prime, making him μελαγχροῖς, (175) 'black-skinned, dark-skinned.' (This adjective's first half *melas* (μέλας, 'black, dark') is the root for our word *melanin*):

ἦ καὶ χρυσεῖη ῥάβδῳ ἐπεμάσσατ' Ἀθήνη.
φᾶρος μὲν οἱ πρῶτον εὐπλυνὲς ἠδὲ χιτῶνα
θήκ' ἀμφὶ στήθεσσι, δέμας δ' ὄφελλε καὶ ἦβην.
ἄψ δὲ μελαγχροῖς γένετο, γναθμοὶ δὲ τάνυσθεν,
κυάνεαι δ' ἐγένετο γενειάδες ἀμφὶ γένειον.

And, indeed, Athena touched him with her golden wand.
First, a well-washed cloak and a tunic
she cast about his breast, then she increased both his stature and his youthful bloom.
And he became dark-skinned again, and his hollow cheeks filled out,
and the beard about his chin took on the deep-blue color/hue of the night sky.

Textual evidence for Greek attitudes towards people with different skin colors (the Classical Period, c. 479– 323 BCE)*

(Reminder: ancient Greeks did not consider skin color 'significant' the same way we do, so do not mention it often!)

I. 'Aithiopians' in Herodotus' *Histories* (written between 440-20 BCE):

Herodotus 3.20 discusses the Egyptian Pharaoh Cambyses' dealings with the Aithiopians, then mentions in passing what many say about the Aithiopians:

οἱ δὲ Αἰθίοπες οὗτοι, ἐς τοὺς ἀπέπεμπε ὁ Καμβύσης, λέγονται εἶναι μέγιστοι καὶ κάλλιστοι ἀνθρώπων πάντων.

And these Aithiopians to whom Cambyses was sending [ambassadors] are said to be the tallest and most beautiful of all humankind.

II. Xenophon's *Agésilas* (a biography of this Spartan king, written c. 360-59 BCE). Below we see the Greeks' negative response to men with 'white' skin:

In *Agésilas* 1.28, Agésilas attempts to inspire his men before they fight Lydians and Persians by 'demonstrating' that Lydians and Persians are 'weaklings'. Note: White skin is considered effeminate: This passage also indicates that the Greeks saw themselves as darker-skinned, not 'white.'

ἡγούμενος δὲ καὶ τὸ καταφρονεῖν τῶν πολεμίων ῥώμην τινα ἐμβαλεῖν πρὸς τὸ μάχεσθαι, προεῖπε τοῖς κήρυξι τοὺς ὑπὸ τῶν ληιστῶν ἀλίσκομένους βαρβάρους γυμνοὺς πωλεῖν. ὀρῶντες οὖν οἱ στρατιῶται λευκοὺς μὲν διὰ τὸ μηδέποτε ἐκδύεσθαι, πίονας δὲ καὶ ἀπόνους διὰ τὰ αἰεὶ ἐπ' ὀχημάτων εἶναι, ἐνόμισαν μηδὲν διοίσειν τὸν πόλεμον ἢ εἰ γυναιξὶ δέοι μάχεσθαι.

And, too, believing that feeling contempt for the enemy would instill some strength and confidence in [his men's] fighting, he directed his heralds to sell the barbarians captured in raids (stripped) naked. Then, upon seeing that the barbarians were white-skinned because of never disrobing [for outdoor exercise], and fat and lazy because of constantly riding on carriages, his soldiers believed that the war would be no different from fighting against women.

III. Sophocles' *Inachus*, a satyr-play (comedy) produced in Athens between 468-06 BCE. Though fragmentary, in Fr. 269a (v. 54) a speaker describes the stranger (Zeus) who impregnated Io:

κάρβανος αἰθὸς ('a black stranger/foreigner').

Zeus is black here because: 1) his son by Io (Epaphos) was black (and born in Egypt!); 2) black Zeus may also be Zeus Ploutos ('Zeus of wealth/bounty/fertility'). As a chthonic ('of the earth/underworld') form of Zeus, he can be portrayed as black — like fertile soil and/or the darkness under the ground (where we find silver, gold, & gemstones). Zeus Ploutos (a 'Zeus of the Underworld') also has ties to Hades. In sum, ancient Greeks did think that Zeus could appear as a 'black' man/Ethiopian.

IV. Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women* (c. 463 BCE) features a chorus of Egyptian black women called the Danaids ('daughters of Danaus'). They are Io's descendants:

To avoid being forced to marry their cousins, the Danaids flee Egypt to seek refuge in Argos (Greece). They beg Argos' king (Pelasgus) for asylum, claiming they are Argive via Io (who was from Argos). Below, Pelasgus is surprised at their claim. But, ultimately, both he & the Argives accept the Danaids as kin (black Argives), caring more about their lineage/ethnicity than their skin color!

ἄπιστα μθυεῖσθ', ὧ ξένοι, κλύειν ἐμοί,
ὅπως τόδ' ὑμῖν ἔστιν Ἀργεῖον γένος.
280 Λιβυστικαῖς γὰρ μᾶλλον ἐμφερέστεραι
γυναιξὶν ἔστε κούδαμῶς ἐγχωρίας.
καὶ Νεῖλος ἂν θρέψειε τοιοῦτον φυτόν,
Κύπριος χαρακτήρ τ' ἐν γυναικεῖοις τύποις
εἰκῶς πέπληκται τεκτόνων πρὸς ἀρσένων:
285 τοίας τ' ἀκούω νομάδας ἵπποβάμοσιν
εἶναι καμήλοις ἀστραβιζούσας, χθόνα
παρ' Αἰθίοσιν ἀστυγειτονουμένας.
καὶ τὰς ἀνάδρους κρεοβόρους Ἀμαζόνας,
εἰ τοξοτευχεῖς ἦτε, κάρτ' ἂν ἦκασα
ὑμᾶς. διδαχθεῖς δ' ἂν τόδ' εἰδείην πλέον,
290 ὅπως γένεθλον σπέρμα τ' Ἀργεῖον τὸ σόν.

Foreign maidens, you tell me a story unbelievable to hear,
how your descent/family is Argive.
For you are more like women of Libya and
280 are not at all like the women native to our land.
The Nile, too, would nurture your kind of stock,
and a Cypriot engraved-design in your likeness
is impressed on female figures by male artisans.
And I hear that there are nomad women of such appearance
285 who ride on padded cushions atop camels as steeds and
live in a land neighboring the Aithiopians.
Indeed, had you been armed with a bow, I would have guessed
that you were husbandless, flesh-devouring Amazons.
But if I should be enlightened [by you], I would understand
290 in more depth how your lineage and seed are Argive.

Broader cultural attitudes of Greeks towards non-Greek ethnicities in the Classical Period (c. 479 – 323 BCE): ‘Greekness’ as a shifting construct*

I. Pre-classical Greeks originally identified with their city states & did not think of themselves collectively as ‘Greeks’ until after the Persian Wars, c. 470s BCE (see Presentation 1):

- A. The Persian Wars prompted Greeks to define themselves as the ‘opposite’ of the Persians — making Persians the first ‘barbarians,’ though the term soon included other non-Greeks..
- B. Greeks considered ‘barbarians’ innately different. According to this ‘racial formation,’ barbarians were irrational beings who required/benefitted from the rational supervision that Greeks could provide (e.g., Aristotle’s *Politics* claims that barbarians are ‘slaves by nature’). In sum, ‘barbarians’ were ‘racialized’, i.e., Greeks viewed ‘ethnicity’ as we view ‘race.’ Thus, Greeks’ belief that environment shapes morals, intellect, appearance, & types of governance meant that ‘wild, unintelligent’ Northern Europeans & ‘servile, intelligent’ Asians benefitted from being enslaved (ideas seen in modern racist discourse).
1. Enslaved ‘barbarians’ were people of all skin colors and ethnicities. Greeks also enslaved each other because of war (between city-states) and poverty. Though Greek city-states had always practiced chattel slavery the newer concept of the ‘barbarian’ merely offered them a different rationale for enslaving others.
 2. The logics applied to ‘barbarians’ mirror those applied to non-citizens in a typical city-state (*especially* women, but also the poor and enslaved people). Since citizens were usually aristocratic men, the ‘racial formation’ of ‘the barbarian’ is effectively aristocratic/elitist, misogynistic chauvinism applied on a broad scale!

II. Yet, unsurprisingly, the 470s BCE also marked the origin of the debate whether ‘Greekness’ was determined by lineage/ancestry or participation in Greek cultural practices: could anyone become ‘Greek’ by adopting ‘Greek’ language, culture, & ritual? As Greek ideas about ‘Greekness’ changed & developed, so did their ‘racial formations.’

A. In Herodotus’ *Histories* 8.144.2 (written in the mid-400s BCE) the Athenians explain to the Spartans why they would never side with Persians against their fellow Greeks. As they do so, they appear to locate ‘Greekness’ in common descent, language, and ancestrally shared cultural practices:

πολλά τε γὰρ καὶ μεγάλα ἐστὶ τὰ διακωλύοντα ταῦτα μὴ ποιεῖν μηδ’ ἦν ἐθέλωμεν, πρῶτα μὲν καὶ μέγιστα τῶν θεῶν τὰ ἀγάλματα καὶ τὰ οἰκήματα ἐμπερησμένα τε καὶ συγκεχωσμένα, τοῖσι ἡμέας ἀναγκαίως ἔχει τιμωρέειν ἐς τὰ μέγιστα μᾶλλον ἢ περ ὁμολογέειν τῶν ταῦτα ἐργασαμένων, αὐτίς δὲ τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν ἐὼν ὁμαιμόν τε καὶ ὁμόγλωσσον καὶ θεῶν ἰδρύματά τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι ἢ θεὰ τε ὁμότροπα, τῶν προδότας γενέσθαι Ἀθηναίους οὐκ ἂν εὖ ἔχοι.

For there are many important/great reasons that keep us from doing this, even if we were willing to do so. First and foremost, is the statues and the temples of our gods, burnt to the ground and covered in rubble [on the Athenian Acropolis], which we are compelled to avenge to the utmost, rather than to make a pact with the one enacting these atrocities [Persia]. And, next, is our being Greek, being of one blood and one tongue, having both shrines of the gods and sacrificial rituals in common, and sharing customs and habits of life, which it would not be right for Athenians to betray.

B. Yet around 380 BCE, as the Athenian orator Isocrates urges all ‘Greeks’ to unite against Persia, he argues that ‘Greekness’ is more about culture/learning than ancestry (*Panegyricus* 50):

τοσοῦτον δ’ ἀπολέλοιπεν ἡ πόλις ἡμῶν περὶ τὸ φρονεῖν καὶ λέγειν τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους, ὥσθ’ οἱ ταύτης μαθηταὶ τῶν ἄλλων διδάσκαλοι γεγόνασι, καὶ τὸ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ὄνομα πεποίηκε μηκέτι τοῦ γένους ἀλλὰ τῆς διανοίας δοκεῖν εἶναι, καὶ μᾶλλον Ἑλληνας καλεῖσθαι τοὺς τῆς παιδείσεως τῆς ἡμετέρας ἢ τοὺς τῆς κοινῆς φύσεως μετέχοντας.

And by so great a distance has our city [Athens] left behind the rest of humanity in respect to thinking and speaking, that her students have become the teachers of others, and she has made it that the name of ‘Hellenes’ [Greeks] no longer seems to be a matter of descent/bloodline [*genos*] but of mindset/understanding [*dianoia*], and that those to be called ‘Hellenes’ are those who share our culture/education [*paideusis*], rather than those who share a common origin/birth/nature [*phusis*].

III. Warning: students should not confuse citizenship with ‘Greekness’. Citizenship was a special status reserved for a small number of wealthy/aristocratic men that allowed them a share in governance, state duties/privileges, and state ritual. Even in democratic Athens, the majority of residents did not have citizenship. You did not need to be a citizen to be ‘Greek’. Thus:

- A. For most city-states: women & common men of Greek ancestry were ‘Greek’, but neither group could be citizens. In democratic Athens: those with Greek ancestry were Greek. All free men with Athenian paternity were citizens until a new law (451 BCE) required that *both* parents be ‘Athenian’. Athenian women in citizen families may have had a form of citizenship tied to state ritual (Block 2017).
- B. If a Greek citizen in city-state ‘X’ moves to city-state ‘Y’, he cannot be a citizen of city-state ‘Y’ but is still Greek. (**Note:**, the Greek for ‘resident alien’ was *metoikos* (in English: *metic*). *Metics* were not usually treated well by the laws of their new city-state. Athens treated its *metics* quite poorly, though wealthier *metics* seem to have had better experiences).
- C. If someone’s ancestry is not Greek but their family has lived in Greece for generations (so she/he speaks Greek, lives like Greeks, & practices Greek religious ritual), is she/he ‘Greek’? See: **II.**, above.

Broader cultural attitudes of Greeks towards non-Greeks in the Hellenistic Period (c. 323 – 30 BCE)

Though ‘Greekness’ was a contested construct well before the Hellenistic period, its parameters experienced a seismic shift after Alexander’s conquests & the rise of the Successor Kingdoms.

I. Warning: About the Macedonians and ‘Greekness’ ...

A. Macedonian ‘Greekness’ was hotly contested by other ancient Greeks: many considered Macedonians ‘barbarians’ because they lived far north in a ‘backwater’ ruled by monarchs (not by citizen assemblies, like ‘real’ Greeks). Macedonian customs & dialect were also different — so much so that Phillip II, King of Macedon, hired Aristotle (a Greek philosopher educated in Athens) to tutor his son Alexander (later called Alexander ‘the Great’) so Alexander could ‘perform’ his Greekness acceptably.

B. Even today, Greece and The Republic of Macedonia (part of the former Yugoslavia) quarrel over Alexander’s identity: is he Macedonian or Greek? This exemplifies how fluid, complex, and political identity can be.

II. During & after Alexander’s campaigns, ‘Greekness’ in the regions he and the Successor Kingdoms ruled was... complicated.

A. Alexander ‘the Great’ did not seem to embrace his tutor Aristotle’s belief that ‘barbarians’ were innately inferior to Greeks. He famously adopted local customs, dress, and ritual to make his “displays of power culturally legible” to his audiences (McCoskey 2012: 67). Hence, though Alexander kept Macedonians as members of his court:

1. In Egypt: he visited the oracle of Ammon at Siwah then claimed to be the son of Zeus/Ammon; he portrayed himself with horns on his coinage (marking his ties to Ammon); and he restored the great Egyptian Temple at Luxor, where he also installed a shrine including 52 images of himself in full Pharaonic regalia.

2. In Persia: he adopted the dress, rituals, and customs of the Persian court; he arranged a mass marriage ceremony in Persia’s capital city Susa, joining (roughly) 100 Macedonian officers to Persian wives (and marrying two Persian women, himself). Incidentally: were the Persian wives (and their children) now ‘Greek’? Persian? Both?

3. To this day, scholars debate whether Alexander was: 1) cynically (and, ultimately, disrespectfully) manipulating his audiences to stabilize his power; 2) over-indulging in exotic spoils/customs because he was succumbing to his appetites or to megalomania (so believing that normal rules did not apply to him); 3) genuinely accepting his role as the ruler of a multi-cultural empire, so adopting local customs out of respect/the belief that non-Greeks ‘counted’; or 4) a mix of the possibilities just listed. What do you think Alexander’s motivations might have been? Keeping in mind that he was already an ‘unusual’ Greek because of his Macedonian heritage: did taking on Egyptian and Persian customs ‘hybridize’ him, or was he still ‘Greek’? If he could ‘mix-and-match culture’ yet still be ‘Greek’ enough, what about his subjects? Is it possible that his Macedonian heritage might have made him more open-minded or flexible about what being ‘Greek’ meant?

B. Though Macedonian ‘Greekness’ is debated, the Macedonian Successor Kingdoms *did* spread Greek language & culture into Africa, the Levant, & the ‘East.’ These kingdoms were “multicultural spaces” where “the meaning of Greekness — as well as the contexts in which being Greek mattered — became even more diverse” (McCoskey 2025: 5).

1. Performative ‘Greekness’ allowed Greeks to distinguish themselves from their new contexts. But ironically, it also led Greek culture to be shaped by local customs and reinforced the idea that ‘Greekness’ was a matter of education and cultural practice, not lineage. In time, ‘Greekness’ in the Hellenistic world did increasingly appear to mean ‘practicing Greek culture’ as much as it meant ‘being of Greek descent’ (McCoskey 2012: 62-4).

C. In Ptolemaic Egypt, we also have evidence for a ‘racialized,’ structural bigotry towards indigenous people who failed to adopt Greek language or customs.

1. “Documentary evidence from Egypt under the Greek Ptolemaic dynasty...suggests that Greek identity conferred a distinct financial advantage there, even as it was tied closely to cultural activities. Assigning a tax break to ‘Hellenes’, the Greek Ptolemaic government thus granted exemptions specifically to those who promoted and practiced Greek culture” (e.g., schoolteachers, athletic coaches, artists of Dionysus, and victors in the games of Alexandrian festivals). Such economic benefits “indicate the government’s broader interest in transforming the racial identities of its subjects” and “seem designed to give ‘dispensation to those prepared to ‘go Greek’” (McCoskey 2025: 6).

In sum, previously ‘not Greek’ Macedonians were now ‘Greek enough’, and non-Greeks could “go Greek”. Whether someone “going Greek” was equal to an ancestral Greek seems to have depended upon context. Regardless, many different groups in the Successor Kingdoms “went Greek”, i.e., Hellenistic ‘racial formations’ were partially or wholly changeable.

Before we can discuss Roman attitudes towards dark skin, ‘Roman-ness’, and non-Romans, we must first talk about Roman citizenship...

Though being ‘Greek’ did not require citizenship, being ‘Roman’ did (Rome was originally a city-state, after all). Yet ‘Roman citizenship’ was itself a constantly shifting construct...

I. Useful information about Roman citizenship:

A. Roman citizens (*cives Romani*) in the Roman republic:

1. The Roman republic was born c. 509 BCE after the Romans expelled their Etruscan rulers. In this republic (the city-state of Rome), only Roman aristocrats (*patricians*) were citizens. *Patrician* men could vote, serve in government, own property, negotiate contracts, marry legally (so inheritance ‘counted’), & expect the law’s full protection. They also had to pay taxes & serve in the military. *Patrician* women were also citizens but had the status of perpetual minors (so required adult male guardianship, though Roman law did offer limited legal avenues for a citizen woman’s emancipation, i.e., legal self-sufficiency).
2. *Patricians* abused their political/legal advantages, however, & exploited Roman commoners (*plebeians*). Thus, c. 494 BCE the *plebeians* ‘seceded’ from Rome: sitting outside the city walls they refused to work or serve in the military so *patricians* could enrich themselves. This won *plebeians* the right to form a council & elect *plebeian* tribunes to represent their interests in government (i.e., a limited form of ‘citizenship’). It also initiated the ‘Conflict of the Orders’ (the *plebeian* order’s struggle with the *patrician* order for political/legal equality). After securing more & more rights over time, *plebeians* achieved full equality in 287 BCE.
3. If a Roman *manumitted* (freed) an enslaved person, that ‘freedman/freedwoman’ (*libertus/liberta*) automatically gained Roman citizenship (with some restrictions). If he/she was married to a free Roman, children born after *manumission* were citizens, too (with *no* restrictions). *Manumission* was not uncommon, and since many enslaved people were foreign it contributed to the growing diversity of Rome’s citizenry. (**Note:** a freed-person’s status was precarious. Continuing freedom required continuing ‘service’ (of any kind) to one’s former owner, who could legally revoke an (allegedly) ‘ungrateful’ freed-person’s freedom).

B. ‘Latin rights’ (*ius Latii*), Roman allies (*socii*) and the expansion of Roman citizenship beyond the city-state of Rome:

1. Around 496 BCE, after conquering nearby Latium’s Latin-speaking tribes, the Romans granted these ‘Latins’ *Latin rights*: Latins kept full rights in their own states. As for their new Roman ‘rights:’ they could do business & negotiate contracts with Romans (as equals), marry Romans, & be granted Roman citizenship. But they could not vote, lacked full legal protection, had to serve in Rome’s army, & had to pay Rome tribute.
2. As Rome expanded into Italy, newly conquered Italian states were granted *Latin rights*, while states that had willingly signed alliance-treaties with Rome were granted the status of ‘allies’ (*socii*). ‘Allies’ had *Latin rights*, including required military service, but did *not* have to pay tribute. After 200 BCE, *socii* and those with *Latin rights* could be awarded Roman citizenship for displays of loyalty. *Latin rights* were also granted to: a) Roman citizens leaving the city of Rome to found/live in Roman colonies; and b) some conquered foreign territories (whose elite were given full Roman citizenship to keep them aligned with Roman interests).
3. Around 150 BCE, magistrates (elected officials) of Italian towns/states were granted Roman citizenship. Further, anyone with *Latin rights* who settled in the city of Rome gained Roman citizenship.
4. By 100 BCE, Italian states had fought for Rome in three Punic wars and now made up 2/3 of the Roman army. The *socii* (allies) sought Roman citizenship but were denied, prompting some to secede from Roman control & igniting the ‘Social Wars’ (= ‘Ally Wars’), c. 91-88 BCE. As a result, c. 90 BCE, Rome offered Roman citizenship to *any* Italian states that had not rebelled and any states that immediately ceased hostilities.

C. Roman ‘mythology’ & Roman citizenship

1. Rome’s unusually ‘inclusive’ attitude towards non-Romans is reflected in (and/or influenced by?) its mythic history. Rome’s epic ancestor was Aeneas, an Asian refugee/Trojan prince who fled Troy’s fall. His descendant Romulus welcomed fugitives, criminals, & those fleeing slavery into his new city of Rome as its first citizens. Additionally, to find wives for this largely male population, Romulus kidnapped women from the nearby Sabine tribe. “Such stories [of] Roman origin... situated the boundaries of Rome, and Roman identity itself, as strikingly porous to outsiders from the very beginning” (McCoskey 2012: 69).

II. Citizenship & legal inclusion in the Roman Empire

A. Ultimately, “a range of status levels... could be granted” to those the Romans conquered: “full citizen, citizen *sine suffragio* (without the vote), ‘Latin’, and ally...[A]s such precise demarcation of civic status suggests, Roman citizenship played an integral role in the Roman incorporation of other groups.” A ‘Roman’ no longer shared ethnicity, nation, or language but “a common citizenship” (McCoskey 2012: 70). Any one of the status levels above (whether it granted partial or full citizenship status/rights) made you ‘Roman under the law.’ (Non-citizens (*peregrini*, ‘foreigners’) used local laws and had no rights or protection under Roman law).

1. Thus, when Marcus Velleius Paterculus summarizes Roman history from 390-100 BCE, he identifies citizenship (& its extension) as a *legal* status (*Compendium of Roman History* 1.14.1, c. 19 BCE – 31 CE):*

Huic rei per idem tempus civitates propagatas auctumque Romanum nomen.
communione iuris haud intempestive subtexturi videmur.

At the same time, in respect to this [*summarizing the history of Roman colonies*], we by no means seem out of place
to weave in the extensions of citizenship & the expansion of the Roman name by the sharing of the law/legal rights (*ius*).

2. The Roman empire was indisputably diverse. Yet also, when it came to Roman *citizenship*: as the Empire kept expanding, so did grants of Roman citizenship & Latin/Ally rights to foreign individuals & territories. Then, in 212 CE the Roman Emperor Caracalla made all free people (men & women) within the Empire ‘Roman citizens’ (via the *Constitutio Antoniniana*). Some scholars argue that Caracalla’s edict was due to (or led to) citizenship’s decreasing ‘value,’ but others argue that citizenship was always a valuable right. What do you think?

Rome’s empire was diverse, but to be ‘Roman’ required Roman citizenship. And as Rome kept offering different citizenship levels to those it subdued, ‘Roman’ diversity expanded, too!

Note: we should not mistake ‘sharing citizenship’ for ‘tolerance.’ Romans were incredibly ethnocentric and, initially, only expanded citizenship status to end or avoid bloodshed. But Romans were also practical: they realized that sharing citizenship helped to stabilize their growing empire. Ultimately, the Romans were always willing to harm any group they deemed threatening, or to exploit any nation for its wealth.

Broader cultural attitudes of the Romans towards non-Romans & different skin-colors (from the late Republican to the Imperial era, c. 200 BCE – 3rd c. CE)

- I.** The Romans adopted the Greek term ‘barbarian’ to describe non-Romans. But unlike Greeks, they thought barbarism marked an inferior condition, not an inferior nature: Roman culture could ‘civilize’ them. Further, different skin colors were deemed no more significant than any other physical or cultural peculiarity that non-Romans might exhibit. Thus, Roman ‘racial formation’ mostly centered on ‘barbarism’ (which, in theory, could be remedied).
- A.** Yet, unexpectedly from our perspective, when it came to Rome’s “racial boundaries...no group would do more to unsettle” them “than the Greeks” (McCoskey 2012: 73). Yes, Greeks worshipped the same gods, had a common descent, influenced Roman philosophy, literature, & art, and even coined the term ‘barbarian,’ but they were non-Romans, conquered by Romans, and from the ‘east.’ Ironically, Romans applied the Greek ‘racial’ stereotype of ‘decadent, eastern barbarians/Persians’ to Greeks themselves!
1. To Cicero (106-43 BCE), the Romans’ exceptional piety/respect for the gods made them superior to Greeks (*On the Responses of the Haruspices* 19). Still, he admired Greeks enough to set them apart from other non-Romans when he divided the world into: Greece, Italy, & ‘barbarian’ lands (*De Finibus* 2.49).
 2. This also explains why Romans often said that Greeks had ruined Rome (e.g., the Roman satirist Juvenal in [III.58-125](#) (c. 55-138 CE), though a satirist is not wholly serious).
- II.** Rome’s “different political structure” which “promoted the incorporation of others into their empire (rather than, say, the merits of democracy and self-rule)” also influenced their approach to ‘barbarism’ (McCoskey 2012: 75).
- A.** Though Romans considered people from the ‘east’ decadent and soft, they did think that some eastern states were closer to Roman than not, so qualified as somewhat civilized (e.g., Greeks and Egyptians). To Romans, the truly savage, barbarian ‘others’ were found in northern & northwestern Europe, where decentralized tribal cultures like the Gauls/Celts & Germans lived.
- B.** Romans often compared Gauls/Celts & Germans (and often confused them with each other, too). But even though the Germans famously obliterated a Roman legion in the Battle of Teutoberg Forest (9 CE), the Romans also admired and romanticized Germans as a fierce, exotic, and conveniently distant northern culture untouched by corrupting external influences — i.e., as ‘noble savages.’
- C.** But the Gauls were the Romans’ original boogey-man, a, scary, northern, ‘racial’ other: c. 390/87 BCE, in a defining act of barbarism, Gauls from northern Italy sacked Rome. These north Italian Gauls were later subdued (in the 190s BCE) and Romanized (becoming Roman citizens in 49 BCE). But Gauls *beyond* Italy remained a plausible threat for years. Even in Caesar’s day, Romans had a visceral hatred/fear of Gauls (McCoskey 2012: 77), and later historians would repeat tales of Gallic barbarity (e.g., [Pomponius Mela 3.18](#) (late 1st c. BCE – c. 45 CE); [Ammianus Marcellinus 15.12.1](#) (c. 330-90 CE)).
- III.** The Roman ‘racialization’ of barbarians meant that Roman authors sometimes noted physical differences like skin color (as evidence for foreign-ness, *not* because they assigned the same values to skin color as our culture does). And given their belief that northern people were completely barbaric, *both* dark *and* ‘pale white’ skin (neither of which were like Italic Romans’ light brown skin) marked barbarity — which, again, could be changed.
- A.** In Petronius *Satyricon* [102.13-15](#), when our ‘heroes’ contemplate disguising themselves as enslaved Ethiopians or Gauls (by darkening or lightening their skin), one character denigrates *both* Ethiopians’ black skin *and* the Gauls’ ‘chalk-white appearance’ (*increti facies*). (Incidentally, this scene confirms that Romans saw themselves as light brown).
1. Notably, this character is especially (and from what our sources indicate, unusually) hostile towards the appearance of enslaved Ethiopians. (Certainly, his companions do not share his sentiment). Freas 2024: 161 suggests that a *type* of “color-coded prejudice” could have been *part* of Roman ethnocentric ‘racialization’ (a type that does not isolate skin color or attach the same import to it as modern racism does). Still, this character also demeans ‘chalk-white’ skin, and evidence confirms that Romans could view pale-white skin negatively, too.
 - B.** The Gauls’/Celts’ ‘unnaturally pale’ skin, hair, & eye color, along with their great height & distinct musculature, apparently reflected their savage, innate otherness (see also **II. C.**’s hyper-links):
 1. Vergil describes the Gallic attack on Rome. The Gauls’ golden hair, cloaks, torcs, & pale skin practically glow in the dark (*Aeneid* 8.657-61, late 1st c. BCE):

Galli per dumos aderant arcemque tenebant, defensi tenebris et dono noctis opacae: aurea caesaries ollis atque aurea vestis, virgatis lucent sagulis, tum lactea colla auro innectuntur,...	The Gauls were approaching through the thickets and seizing the citadel, covered by darkness and by the gift of shadowy night: their hair is golden, and their clothing is golden, too. They gleam in their striped, short military cloaks, and their milky-white necks are encircled with gold...
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 2. Diodorus Siculus (1st c. BCE) remarks upon the Gauls’ distinctive physical characteristics (*Bibliotheca Historica* 5.28.1:

οἱ δὲ Γαλάται τοῖς μὲν σώμασίν εἰσιν εὐμήκεις, ταῖς δὲ σαρκὶ κάθυγροι καὶ λευκοί, ταῖς δὲ κόμαις οὐ μόνον ἐκ φύσεως ξανθοί, ἀλλὰ καὶ διὰ τῆς κατασκευῆς ἐπιτηδεύουσιν αὔξειν τὴν φυσικὴν τῆς χροῶς ιδιότητα.	And as for their physical makeup, the Gauls are tall, and they are rippling-muscled and bright-white of skin. As for their hair, not only are they naturally golden-tressed, but they even make it a practice to increase the peculiar nature of its color by artifice.
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 - 3 The Greeks also ‘racialized’ Gauls/Celts: in the early 3rd c. BCE, Celts invaded the Greek peninsula, attacking the sacred site of Delphi. After the Celts’ defeat, ‘Greeks against Celts’ combat scenes appeared beside ‘Olympians vs. Giants’ & ‘Greeks vs. Amazons’ scenes in Hellenistic art. Like mythic monsters, Celts were now a barbaric ‘other,’ civilization’s enemy. Yet also, the Hellenistic poet Callimachus (early 3rd c. BCE) ridiculed their pale appearance, swarming attack-strategy, & barbaric northern origins by calling them ‘snowflakes’ (νιφάδεςσιν, *Hymn to Delos*, 175).
- Italic Romans accepted non-Italic citizens as Romans & were accustomed to dealing with people from all over the empire. But they could still be ‘racist’ (via their own ‘racial formations’). If Romans mentioned or disparaged skin-color (which was not common), both ‘black’ and ‘pale-white’ skin were possible targets. Further, Romans generally viewed ‘pale’ northern Europeans as much more ‘barbaric’ than other foreigners. What does this tell us about ancient Roman identity? What did ‘Romans’ look like? What does this teach us about using ancient texts in modern cultural or political debates?**

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